

2022-02-01: RCMP Briefing Notes for Premier Kenney for Trucker Convoy Blockade

Background:

- On January 29, 2022, a convoy of semi trucks and passenger vehicles travelled to the Coutts border (via Highway 4) to protest COVID-19 mandates (including but not limited to, the cross-border vaccination health orders applicable to truck drivers transporting goods).
- This was held in conjunction with the Freedom convoys that travelled to Ottawa, ON, and similar convoy protests and disruptions were held at locations within RCMP jurisdiction across the province.
- Splinter groups have formed, the main organizers have separated themselves from this group, but the splinter groups remain embedded within the general blockage in the area.
- RCMP Alberta (K Division) Emergency Operations Centre (K DEOC) was activated for this event, and will continue to coordinate information, resources and tasking through this central point as the protests continue to occur.

Objectives (taken from Gold Intent – need to be narrowed):

- Protect life & property
- Minimize crime and disorder & provide proportionate policing response
- Maintain the health and wellness of employees involved in response
- Minimize disruption to Community and Businesses
- Maintain confidence in policing
- Maintain community cohesion
- Maintain business as usual internally

History / Chronology:

- As of January 30, 2022, all protests within RCMP jurisdiction (with the exception of the Coutts blockade) appear to have finished.
- On Saturday, January 29, 2022, the number of semi trucks and passenger vehicles travelling to the border crossing has resulted in Highway 4 north and southbound lanes, from Coutts, AB to the Port of Entry point becoming completely blocked.
- The blockages in the southbound lane appear to be a result of volume, and in the northbound lane are a result of an intentional vehicle blockade being created (splinter groups).

- The blockages on the Canadian side of the border have resulted in a traffic slowdown and standstill on the US side of the border.
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- RCMP has been working with CBSA and US Customs and Border Services in an attempt to identify and facilitate alternative border crossing for the traffic backed up at the Port of Entry (POE).
- Most requests to CBSA were denied at the local level (i.e. opening alternative ports, moving the escorted convoy of trapped trucks across the border), and necessitated the request to go through to RCMP National Headquarters in Ottawa and be decided upon by CBSA at the national level. Once this occurred, some of the requests were approved, such as moving the escorted convoy across the border using the alternate roadway.
- A joint initiative between RCMP, CBSA, and the US Customs and Border Services was completed which involved escorting approximately 30 semi trucks that were stuck just north of the border (in the border clearance lot), to a secondary roadway which allowed the trucks to re-enter Highway 4 and head northbound once past the blockages.
- The RCMP Consultative Conflict Management Group (CCMG) continues trying to engage protest participants, however, the engagement from the organizers has diminished since the beginning of the blockage. The splinter groups are refusing to engage in any protest options alternative to a full highway blockade.
- Strategic traffic checkpoints have been established to re-route southbound traffic away from the Coutts congestion. This also prevents any additional protestors from accessing the main congestion location.
- RCMP investigators have been engaged in communication with the event participants, identifying a number of participants who attended in the first instance for support, but now wish to leave but cannot due to their position within the blockade.
- Protestors are being supplied with food, alcohol, and supplies by people driving pickup trucks across farmland and through ditches, avoiding the checkpoints. Food trucks have been set up in the area for this purpose as well.
- As of January 31, 2022, a number of trucks had managed to leave by backing up into the townsite and travelling to rejoin Highway 4 northbound.
- The splinter group has become more organized since the beginning, and there have been a few leaders identified. RCMP has established communication with these individuals, however, there is still no progress in exploring any options to move vehicles and free up the traffic flow. A number of different options have been presented but none have been entertained.
- A number of semi trucks that wanted to leave but couldn't (were originally prevented from leaving by the splinter groups), were allowed to leave (exact number not confirmed).
- As of January 31, 2022 it was estimated there were more than 200 semi trucks and passenger vehicles still engaged in the blockade.

- Sheriffs and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement (CVE) have been engaged and are at strategic locations for the other border crossings (Del Bonita and Carway) to ensure only legitimate commercial traffic passes through, as reports have been received that additional protests may be set up at the other border crossings.
- Information has been received (not confirmed), that there may be a number of participants in the blockade with firearms in their possession.
- The group is using a number of social media channels to convey information and communicate police presence and locations.
- RCMP Strategic Communications has been engaged in public messaging through social media channels to protect public safety and issue advisories to stay away from the area.
- Containment has been put in place to secure access to the area as much as possible.

Complexity / Challenges:

- The large number of vehicles involved and the size of the vehicles involved present major challenges for access and removal.
- Location of the blockade: lack of major roadways in the area, especially those accessible to semi trucks, makes it difficult to identify alternate access and exit routes.
- The large, open rural area makes it difficult to establish secure access points and a containment perimeter, due to the size of the area, multiple access points, and protest supporters' ability to bypass roadways and travel through farmlands. This creates safety concerns for police and support personnel involved, as this creates an opportunity for protest sympathizers to surround the police and create harm.
- Information being put out through social media and through discussions with protestors has involved mention of violence and firearms involvement, which presents a high risk to police and public safety.
- If warranted, mass arrests will be needed to deal with the number of protestors. When these occur, there are many additional challenges that arise, including but not limited to: resourcing for arrest execution; prisoner processing and holding; and proceeding to court with charges.
- Engaging local businesses, such as tow companies for vehicle removal, is proving difficult as local businesses do not want to be perceived as taking one side (either the police's side or the protestors' side). This is further complicated by the fact that this is a small rural area, where many people are known to each other.
- Numerous resources are required to deal with these types of events, and these are pulled from across the province, which creates strain on the organization while it maintains its policing obligations to the entire province, as well as dealing with the resource shortages impacted by the pandemic.
- There are a number of agencies involved, including the USA, and coordination of solutions between multiple agencies is complex. The lack of CBSA engagement at the beginning of the event made it difficult to establish options and strategies.

Plan Going Forward:

- RCMP, including the Special Tactical Operations (STO) unit is preparing for engagement on starting February 1, 2022 and centralizing resources for the police removal of the blockades.
- Investigators continue to try and deescalate the situation through voluntary compliance.
- Multiple arrests are planned to occur today, if required.
- RCMP extra resources are being put in place for extended operations.
- Other agencies such as Lethbridge Regional Police and Calgary Police Public Order Units have been engaged to support the RCMP as required.

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